

CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF MACAULAY'S HISTORY

ENGLISH historians used to excel in the art of historical composition. Robertson, and Hume, and Gibbon earned European fame, not only as what were termed then 'philosophical historians' but on account of the skill with which they arranged and constructed their narratives of the past. The art seems almost lost in England now. Since Macaulay himself there has been only one great narrative historian, Froude, and he is in many ways inferior to Macaulay. Other recent historians, whatever learning and whatever literary merits they possessed, did not possess the art of telling a story : they were able at most to describe a scene or relate an episode, but the long, sustained, harmonious narrative, was above their powers or below their aims. And this art of telling a story is so essential a qualification for writing history, that it is desirable to enquire into the nature of the art and investigate the practice of its great exponents.

Regarded as a mere record of facts Macaulay's History is almost equally worthy of study. Written from sixty to seventy years ago it still holds its place. No English historian has ventured to retell in detail the story of the Revolution and the reigns of James II and William III. A sort of superstitious terror seems to prevent them from

treading in the enchanted circle where
Macaulay's magic
works. His History is still *the* authority on
the period.
Yet at the same time it has shortcomings
which diminish